Conspiracy said possible in assassination of King

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WASHINGTON (AP) — After a two-year investigation, the House assassinations committee found strong suggestions of a conspiracy in the death of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., but no clear proof anyone other than James Earl Ray was involved.

The panel completed a month of public hearings on the assassination Friday and Rep. Louis Stokes, D-Ohio, committee chairman, said he believes the inquiry found "the outline of a conspiracy."

But he said, "I'm not sure we proved conclusively that there was a conspiracy."

The next step calls for committee members to reach detailed conclusions on the investigation in which the staff conducted 2,686 interviews, traveled to dozens of cities in the United States and abroad and issued 260 subpeonas.

A final report will cover the King assassination and the shooting of the late President John F. Kennedy, whose slaying was also investigated by the committee. The report is expected next year.

Committee counsel G. Robert Blakey has said it is likely that one or both of James Earl Ray's brothers, John and Jerry, played some part in planning or carrying out King's assassination on April 4, 1968, outside a Memphis, Tenn., motel.

James Earl Ray is serving a 99-year prison term for the assassination. He pleaded guilty to the killing in 1969, but recanted in a confession shortly thereafter and now claims he was an unwitting participant in a conspiracy.

The committee spent time Friday asking John Ray about bank robberies in which he allegedly participated but never asked him directly if he had a role in the assassination.

Ray's lawyer, James H. Lesar, said Ray would have denied any involvement if asked.

At the time of the King killing, John Ray managed the Grapevine, a St. Louis bar which committee investigators say was frequented by rightwing segregationists who circulated an offer of $50,000 for anyone who would kill the civil rights leader.

John Ray said he never heard any such discussions in the bar.

Describing himself as a "moderate segregationist," Ray acknowledged putting up a George Wallace poster and selling bumper stickers on behalf of the American Independent Party presidential candidate in 1968.

Among the final witnesses Thursday was Jerry Ray, who sported a black eye obtained Monday in St. Louis during his arrest inside a private home on charges of robbery and attempted assault.

Ray explained his arrest to the committee by saying, "I wandered into the wrong house."